

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000839

SIPDIS

STATE PASS NSC FOR FFTOWNSEND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KTFN](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN "POSTPONES" AL QUDS CONFERENCE, WORRIES
ABOUT OPPOSITION

REF: A. MANAMA 811 B. STATE 103714 C. MANAMA 823

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

1. (U) This is an action message -- see para 8.

2. (S) Summary. Bahrain has decided to "postpone" an Al Quds Institute conference planned for next week, and the MFA has assured us that postponement really means cancellation. In delivering that welcome news, MFA MinState Abdul Ghaffar at the same time passed on his concern that Embassy contacts with boycotting opposition societies were sending the wrong message and strengthening their resolve against the government, rather than encouraging them to participate in upcoming elections. Ambassador took the opportunity to reiterate our hope that an amicable solution could be found to the government's dispute with the dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). Abdul Ghaffar reiterated past criticism of BCHR, focusing especially on Abdul Hadi Al-Khawaja, whom he called a dangerous man who should be on our terrorist list. While it is U.S. policy to encourage oppositionists to participate in the political process, the Embassy has discovered that prominent members of several opposition societies, including leading Shia boycotter Al-Wifaq, and four members of Parliament were recently placed on a Washington "VGTO" list of those ineligible to enter the United States. Embassy requests guidance on this action. End Summary.

3. (S) Following Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Frances Fragos Townsend's June 10 phone call to the Crown Prince, MFA Minister of State Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar requested a meeting with the Ambassador June 11 to advise that the government had decided to "postpone" the conference that the Al Quds Institute had planned to hold in Bahrain June 18-20. He said they were using the word "postpone" but in fact had no intention of letting it take place in Bahrain at a later date. He said that the Foreign Ministry would never have let the conference be scheduled if they had known about it; the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had simply not focused on who would be involved. (Note: Bahrain newspaper "Al-Akhbar Al-Khaleej" reported on its front page June 12 that the organizing committee, in coordination with the Al Quds Institute, had decided to postpone the conference, saying that due to current and unsuitable circumstances some prominent figures had been unable to attend.)

4. (C) Noting that Bahrain had canceled the event at the request of the U.S. (the Ambassador interjected that he hoped Bahrain likewise considered the cancellation to be the right thing to do, given the invited participants), Abdel Ghaffar said that, on the other side, he hoped the U.S. would cooperate with the Government of Bahrain in its efforts to deal with the boycotting opposition societies. "When you meet with them," he said, "or when visitors like DAS Carpenter meet with people like Jawad Asfoor (board member of the dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), who attended a dinner hosted by the Ambassador for DAS Carpenter), "it sends the wrong message." Instead of encouraging them to work with the government and participate in the system, he said, it does the opposite. They tell people that they met with American officials, who support what they are doing. Be careful, he said. They tell you one thing, but tell others something completely different. "Strengthening these people," he added, "is bad for reform." He cited Abdul Hadi Al-Khawaja as a particular concern, labeling him a "terrorist" trained in Iran who has his own agenda which has nothing to do with participation in parliamentary politics. He should be on your terrorist list, he stated.

5. (C) The Ambassador said that embassies, as a matter of course, meet with a range of people, and that our aim in meeting with representatives of opposition or boycotting societies is to encourage participation in the upcoming elections. The Ambassador then raised the BCHR, noting Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Al Belooshi's recent statements that it must stop its activities or face prosecution. He hoped that an amicable solution could be reached with the BCHR and its members; heavy-handed action against them would invariably generate international, including U.S., criticism.

16. (C) Abdul Ghaffar said that the government very much wants to encourage the boycotters to participate in next year's elections. The problem is that some of these people, even if they say they believe in the system and say they want to participate, in fact do not. Al-Khawaja, who is associated with the BCHR, is a dangerous man. People are reporting, he said, that Al-Khawaja was behind the violence that took place on the weekend over a wall built by a royal family member in the Shia village of Malkiya. (Note: Others have said the same, including Mansour Al-Jamry, editor of the independent newspaper Al-Wasat, who has been publicizing the Malkiya wall issue and participated in the weekend demonstration. Al-Jamry says that Al-Khawaja is determined to provoke the government to arrest him. End note.) Regarding the BCHR in general, Abdul Ghaffar said that it had burned its bridges, especially through its association with Al-Khawaja and his supporters. The first president, Abdul Aziz Abul, quit because of the activities of Al-Khawaja within the BCHR, he said. BCHR members, when they first approached the King about establishing the Center, were very clear in stating to the King that their intent was to document human rights concerns. However, they have continually gone far beyond what they agreed to do and what they were licensed to do.

17. (C) Comment. The Crown Prince told Frances Townsend that he would welcome Embassy help to encourage boycotters to participate in next year's elections. The next day, Abdul Ghaffar -- seemingly contradictorily -- indicated that Embassy engagement with the boycotters would have the opposite effect of our intent: strengthening their resolve to oppose the government and not participate. The Ambassador will seek to engage the CP on exactly how he sees us helping to encourage their participation.

18. (S) Action request. A major element of Abdul Ghaffar's line of reasoning is that at least some of the boycotters have dangerous connections to Iran and Hizbollah. While U.S. policy has been to reach out to boycotters and encourage their participation, the fact that, according to post consular section research, on May 7 at least seven boycotters from Al-Wifaq and other opposition societies were placed on the "VGTO" hit list as ineligible to travel to the U.S. presents a conflicting position of what exactly the USG position is towards the boycotters (four sitting members of parliament were placed on the list the same day). Embassy requests guidance on why these boycotters were deemed ineligible to travel to the U.S., and what implications this may have for our relations with and outreach to such opposition societies as Al-Wifaq.

MONROE